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ABSTRACT

Children's literature can be used effectively to enrich the reading content of basal reading materials with stories and information by and about ethnic minorities. Developing an ethnic cultural web for a literary selection can stimulate language and enhance the thought processes of students. Using the webbing process, elementary school students can be encouraged to search for information and work together in interest or research groups. Another alternative to developing multiethnic literature for basal readers is to elaborate on a literary story. Children can also write biographies of famous ethnic persons. As the need to enrich the reading programs develops, similar culture webs could be built for other ethnic groups. Not only could stories about minority groups be used to develop a balanced representation of the cultural groups in the United States, but the folk literature of any minority group of any region can be used. Books of individual African folktales that reflect the values and traditions of various African cultures can be used to acquaint black children with their heritage and to instill respect for the black heritage in all children. The use of multiethnic literature can help present an accurate and balanced representation of minorities and other societal groups and can help to overcome the deficiencies that are still present in many of the textbooks used today. (Sample activities are included.) (HOD)

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Multiethnic Literature:

Supplements for Basal Readers

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Multiethnic Literature:

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School success and achievement! What does this mean to the child of an ethnic minority who comes into an educational system that is often different from his own culture, language, and environment? Success and achievement for the minority child means academic understanding and the ability to function socially in a pluralistic society. Arciniega and Maestas (1981) found that minority students comprise a large percentage of the student population in many of our urban school districts and that their achievement level is consistently below that of the total national age population of non-minority students. Their progress through the schools is commonly two or three levels behind the non-minority students. Arciniega and Maestas also state that the inadequate treatment and representation of the historical, cultural, and economic contributions made by minorities in the school curricula lead to intercultural conflict and persistent reinforcement of stereotypes

The minority students are "plugged" into the school curricula, which is often irrelevant and meaningless for them. This curriculum will probably contain multiethnic literature that portrays minorities in an unrealistic and distorted fashion (Ortega, 1974). According to Zintz (1982), students progress academically by developing a sense of personal worth, feeling of security and social acceptance. If what Zintz states is true, then the basal reading content reflected in our school reading programs needs to reflect the positive attitudes of a pluralistic society toward other cultures. Reflection of multiethnic

literature can serve as a vehicle through which we socialize children and transmit our cultures. Garcia and Osborn (1981) surveyed 2500 stories in a reading series published between 1977-1980, in which, the portrayal of minorities was distorted and not indicative of the groups' accomplishments.

After conducting a review of the literature on the content of basal readers, we realize that the need of unbiased and realistic multiethnic literature is crucial. Multiethnic literature needs to present minority cultures living as respectable, contributing members of society who have assorted human qualities and varied living and working conditions. We do not see this in basal readers today. Multiethnic literature -- i.e. folktales, trade books, biographies, fiction and non-fiction do portray minorities realistically and as contributing members of society.

In attempting to help minority children, Gezi (1981) recommends alternative models of education in which program instructional materials and approaches are unbiased, mindful of student languages, varied and appropriate to the maturity level of the student, enabling students to learn from all cultures. If an "alternative model" is applied to school curricula, perhaps the data reported by Campbell and Wirtenberg (1980) is viable and worthy of continued examination. A number of studies, which focused on intergroup relations among learners assigned to use multicultural material, reported increased favorable attitudes toward Blacks by both Black and White learners who read stories depicting the targeted groups in varied roles. Increased reading motivation and comprehension among learners using multicultural materials also was observed in a number of investigations.

Minority children prefer reading content where they find meaning and relevancy to real-life situations, values and experiences. Heather Blair (1982) suggests that literature for children is powerful and not only can increase academic success by motivating and stimulating minority children, but has the capacity to transport readers into a different reality and make them appreciate other people and their problems and lifestyles. In this article, we will discuss some insights and implications regarding supplements to basal reading material.

Multiethnic Literature Supplements

Children's literature can be used effectively to enrich the reading content of the basals with stories and information by and about ethnic minorities. Norton (1983) has identified a series of steps to be used to bring about an appreciation of a minority culture through the study of its children's literature. These steps include the following:

1. Identify values that children can gain from multiethnic literature.
2. Investigate methods for determining and improving children's attitudes toward contributions of all people.
3. Identify traditional cultural values that may be highly valued in the literature and in the children's heritage.
4. Develop criteria for evaluating multiethnic literature.
5. Evaluate multiethnic literature available in libraries.
6. Select children's literature that provides positive multiethnic viewpoints.
7. Develop ethnic cultural webs that illustrate the varied subjects to be covered in the multiethnic literature study.
8. Develop instructional strategies and activities that encourage appreciation for ethnic contributions and an understanding of the similarities and differences between ethnic groups.

Hispanic Americans

Developing an ethnic cultural web for a literary selection stimulates language and enhances the thought processes of students. Norton (1977) defined the "webbing process" as an instructional strategy that can be used to increase understanding and application of skills in science, social studies, reading and language arts. Using the webbing process can encourage elementary students to search for information and work together in interest or research groups. Given below is an example of an ethnic cultural web for Hispanic Americans. A cultural web representing the Hispanic American could include the following pieces of children's literature to supplement the basal reader. The table labeled Figure One indicates the webbing process.

Insert Figure One here

Another alternative to developing multiethnic literature for basal readers is to elaborate on a literary story as described below.

How Carla Saw the Shalako God, by Biloine W. Young

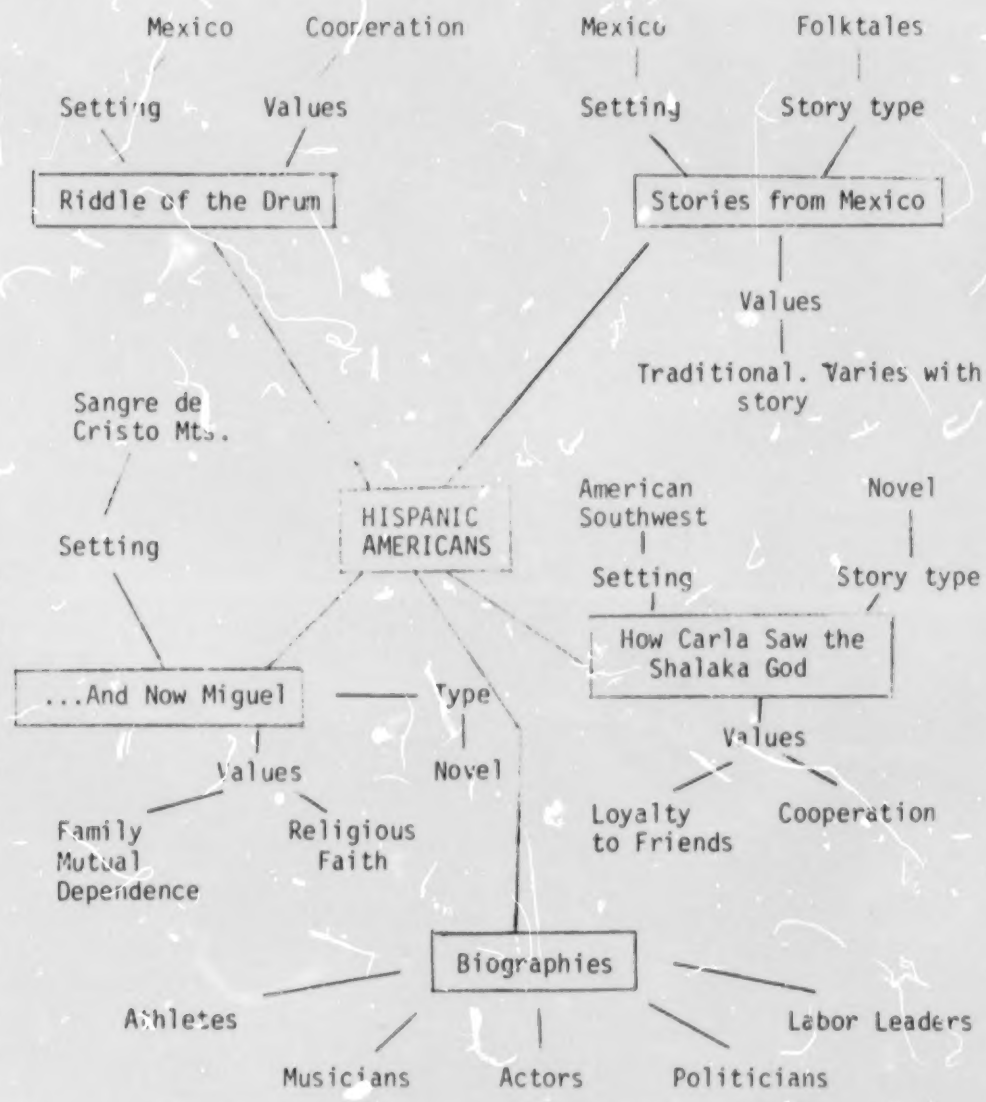
"Mary Wilson", is the story of a friendship between two young girls. Carla was Spanish-American. Maria was Zuni. Although the two girls became good friends, Carla would not be able to attend the Shalako ceremonies because of ancient conflicts between the Spanish and the Zuni. Things work out with the intervention of the school principal and the Zuni governor.

Procedure:

1. After reading the story to the children, discuss some of the following:

   a. What are some of the things Maria and Carla did together?

Figure One. Cultural Web



b. How do you think Carla felt when she found out she couldn't go to the Shalako ceremonies? How would you have felt?

c. Do you think Carla should have been allowed to go to the Shalako? Why?

d. Maria's mother baked bread in an outside oven. Discuss some of the advantages and disadvantages for cooking bread outside in the summer.

2. Discuss aspects of the modern Zuni culture that are found in the story that relate to housing, occupations, dress, foods, etc. Then have different groups of children take one aspect of the culture to research how the Zuni lived long ago. Then bring the groups together to compare the modern way of life with the old. (NOTE: The research will be simplified if you have encyclopedias and reference books on North American Indians of the appropriate reading level already in the room or borrowed from the library. Most librarians are very helpful in this regard.)

3. Have another group look through books on the history of the American Southwest to find out about the old conflicts between the Zuni and the Spanish. Have the group explain how these conflicts could cause bad feelings among the modern Zuni with people of a Spanish American or Mexican American background.

Children can also write biographies of contemporary famous Hispanic Americans. They should develop focal questions before they begin looking for information. In a brainstorming session, elicit from the children the kinds of information about the people in whom they would be interested. Write these ideas on the chalkboard during the brainstorming session. After each group chooses a person to write about, they can copy down the ones from the chalkboard whom their group wants to use. Some examples of famous Hispanic Americans are Vikki Carr (singer), Lee Trevino (golfer), Henry Cisneros (mayor of San Antonio), Henry Gonzalez (Congressman), Kika de la Garza (Congressman), Jose Feliciano (musician), Pele (athlete), Cezar Chavez (labor leader), and Ricardo Mantalban (actor).

As the need develops to enrich the reading programs, similar culture webs could be built for other ethnic groups. There are many excellent choices of children's literature available for Black Americans and Native Americans, both in a historical setting and a contemporary one. Not only could stories about these three minority groups be used to develop a balanced presentation of the cultural groups in the United States, but the folk literature of any minority group of any region can be used.

Native Americans

Many excellent children's books are available for children which are written by and about Native Americans. These books can be used to teach writing and reading skills, as well as develop the cognitive skills of the students. For example, the book, Hawk, I am Your Brother by Baylor Parnell can be used both to develop the students critical reading skills and to provide the motivation for writing. Rudy Soto, a contemporary Native American, wants to fly more than anything else in the world. He steals a baby hawk from its nest thinking that somehow he'll fly if a hawk becomes his brother. However, the hawk is unhappy in confinement so Rudy decides to let him go. The story illustrates many of the traditional values associated with Native Americans: the brotherhood of all things in nature, the right of each individual to make his own decisions, love of personal freedom and the importance of living in harmony with nature.

Procedure:

1. After the students have read the story, or you have read it to them, discuss some of the following.

    a. What did Rudy Soto want to do more than anything else?

b. Why did Rudy feel he was the hawk's brother?

c. Why did he steal the hawk from its nest on Santos Mountain?

d. Was the hawk happy with Rudy? How do you know?

e. Did anybody force Rudy to release the bird? Who decided that the hawk should be free?

f. How do you think Rudy felt when he saw the hawk flying after it was released?

2. Have the students write a story from a hawk's point of view. Have them imagine that they are the hawk that Rudy captured. Ask them to write what happened to them (as the hawk) from the time Rudy took the hawk from its nest.

3. Have the students illustrate the book with flannel board pictures. Have them draw pictures depicting the major events in the story. Place pieces of flannel, pellon, felt, or other substances that will stick to the felt board on the back of the pictures. Have them (a) place the pictures in the order the events happened and (b) retell the story with the flannel board pictures.

Other good literary choices that can be used in a similar way are:

Annie and the Old One, by Miska Miles

Arrow to the Sun, by Gerald McDermott

The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses, by Paul Goble

When Clay Sings, by Byrd Baylor

Legend of Scarface, by Robert San Souci

The Fire Bringer, by Margaret Hodges

Books of individual African folktales which reflect the values and traditions of various African cultures can be used to acquaint Black children with their heritage and to instill respect for the Black heritage in all children. Some of these books are:

Who's in Rabbit's House, by Verna Aardema

The Drinking Gourd, by F.M. Monjo

Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears, by Verna Aardema

A Story, A Story, by Gail Haley

Children of the Sun, by Jan Carew

Adventures of Spider: West African Folktales, by Joyce Cooper Arkhurst

Representative poetry written by Black writers is appropriate for sharing with children. Resources for poetry are:

Bronzeville Boys and Girls, by Gwendolyn Brooks

Many books by Langston Hughes

Star by Star, by Naomi Long Madgett

"Gertrude" in Bronzeville Boys and Girls, is excellent for teaching tactile imagery and rhyme patterns. "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes for teaching tactile and visual imagery. "Midway", found in Madgett's Star by Star is about persistence in reaching one's goals, and is good for teaching various kinds of imagery, rhyme, and rhythm patterns.

Children can research the lives of various Black Americans who have made major contributions to our culture: Henry Ossawa Tanner (artist), John James Audubon (artist), Jesse Owens (athlete), Jackie Robinson (athlete), Wilma Rudolph (athlete), Louis Armstrong (musician), Ethel Waters (musician), Marian Anderson (musician), Phillis Wheatley (poet), Langston Hughes (writer), W.E.B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr. (all three civil rights leaders), Benjamin Banneker (scientist and mathematician), Mary McLeod Bethune (educator), Matthew Henson (explorer), and many more. After the children have identified the contributions made by each, have the children classify them according to various criteria: the time period in which they lived, the geographic area they lived in, or the type of contribution made (e.g. scientific, academic, artistic, etc.). This type of activity

not only increases appreciation for the contributions of this minority group, but also will help alleviate some stereotypes associated with Blacks achievements.

Conclusion

An accurate and balanced representation of minorities and other societal groups in basal readers and children's literature is fundamental to the enhancement of basic educational goals. Research in the area of prejudice reduction indicates that accurate information about minorities is one of the variables, when employed in combination with other variables, that is effective at reducing prejudice in the literature (Page, 1981). The sample activities presented in this paper and the various uses of children's literature that have been delineated can help to overcome the deficiencies that are still present in the textbooks our students use. Teaching all students, not only minority students, about the diversity of cultures can enhance understanding and appreciation of other people as we continue to live in a pluralistic society. The use of multiethnic literature could possibly produce changes not only in the reading content of the curriculum, but also in the teaching practices and social behavior of the classroom.

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